

# ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE



WEDNESDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2013

GATESHEAD COLLEGE

**Report:** Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 16  
January 2013

**Author:** Clerk

**Action:** Approve

**Status:** Open

**Present:** David Mitchell (Chair)  
Keith Cann Evans  
Vivien Shipley  
Tom Cantwell  
Darren Heathcote  
Allan Steele  
Mark Taylor  
Richard Thorold

**In attendance:** Judith Doyle  
John Gray  
Gwyneth Jones  
Kevin Marston  
Tim Poolan  
Andrew Robson  
Kevin Smith  
Clare Sample (Clerk)

## 1. Welcome/Apologies

David Mitchell welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Tracy Ashcroft, Gail Etherington and Brian Rapkin.

The Chair invited members to declare any interests on any item on the agenda. No interests were declared at this stage in the meeting; however, members noted that should the direction of debate on any item result in a potential conflict of interest, this should be indicated during the meeting. Members were also reminded to advise the Clerk of any changes to be made to declaration of interests.

## 2. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2012

A governor indicated that the wording on her comment under Apprenticeship programmes on page 7 should be changed to read 'it should be overall and timely success rates as in the data tables'. She also suggested that the wording of the resolution on page 11 should be amended to read 'RESOLVED to note the report, approve the grades as discussed and recommend those grades to the Board'.

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2012 were accepted as a correct record once these amendments were made to the wording on page 7 and page 11.

### **3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising which were not substantive items on the agenda.

### **4. Quality Improvement Plan 2012/13**

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality, Judith Doyle (JD) introduced a document which showed the College's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) level for those areas which required improvement; as identified in the Self Assessment Report 2011/2012. She advised that the document also included extracts from the more detailed QIPs, for the three areas which were being discussed at the meeting: SSA 5: Construction, SSA 9: Creative Industries and SSA 15: Business, Leadership & Management.

JD provided a high level summary of the main actions overview of what was contained in the Plan which included areas of improvement; key actions to do with success rates; teaching & learning observations; new performance management system. She advised that the Functional Skills eg literacy and numeracy, would come out in the reports presented at the meeting as well the destination information. There is an emphasis on improving teachers who are grade 3 and for quick intervention for those teachers who are grade 4.

The Self Assessment process will be described for each area. There was an expectation that the reports presented would highlight areas of concern.

The report, generally, has much more emphasis on performance and success rates. The report shows how seriously the managers have taken the feedback. As a result of this actions are already in place to make improvements. JD proposed to bring a report to the next meeting, and each subsequent meeting, regarding outcomes.

JD advised that members would need to identify which areas the committee wanted to scrutinise at the next Academic Standards Committee meeting on 13 February 2013.

The Chair enquired whether the QIP would need to go to the Board and JD replied that as it was a large document and only part of it would do so. The document is 65 pages in total. There was some discussion over how much of the report should go to the Board with a suggestion from the Chair that it should be the Executive Summary. She advised that part of the feedback was about what was being done but also evidence of impact. A governor asked who had overall responsibility for monitoring the document. JD replied that ultimately it was the Principal; however, she was responsible for providing an update on the document at weekly Senior Management Team meetings. The governor wanted to know what would happen if she was absent and JD said that her three Strategy Managers would then take over responsibility.

Another governor commented that she found the three pages relating to the Overall College very helpful however she felt that two high level strategic issues were missing; rigour of self assessment and building a self-critical and evaluative culture. JD replied that these could be added to the document. The governor referred to Strengthening the Teaching and Learning observation process and enquired whether there should be a higher level strategic point above this. JD agreed to re-word this. JD also said that performance was being monitored and it would ultimately result in better standards of teaching. The College was taking an individualised approach to Teaching and Learning and she advised that the process had become outcome focused

The Chair enquired why the targets for 'value-added' were not higher: 35% of learners achieving 'excellent' value-added (31% in 2011/2012) and 85% of learners achieving

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'solid' value-added or better (81% in 2011/2012). The Strategy Manager – Quality and Performance, Andrew Robson replied that the targets were based on Alps analysis in 2011/2012. The College was fairly early on the journey and it clearly wanted to improve performance so had given realistic targets. The Chair indicated that he was reassured that logic was being applied to the target data driver.

The Chair enquired how the curriculum provision was measured. JD replied that the target was '30% of the curriculum to fully embed entrepreneurial and employability skills' thus making students more employable which was the College's USP. This also involved destination information about students getting jobs and establishing whether they were 'work ready'. JD acknowledged that 30% was low and that the College hoped to improve this.

A governor asked about the format of the QIP as there was also the Post OFSTED Inspection Action Plan and there appeared to be some overlap. He thought that there should be an additional column for 'progress to date'. Another governor enquired why there were two plans and if there was a need for both when there was duplication. The Principal replied that the Board had originally requested the Post Ofsted Inspection Action Plan to be put in place. The Chair advised that whether there was still a need for two separate documents would be discussed further under item 6 on the agenda.

A governor observed that the College had no control over who enrolled and, therefore, it was difficult to set targets from day one. The Principal replied that students were assessed as they walked through the door in order to identify what they needed to do. Another governor confirmed that the college employ experienced and professional people who know how to assess students and set realistic targets. The Chair concluded the discussion and sought agreement from the Committee that it was content to approve QIP Executive Summary subject to one or two amendments.

**RESOLVED to recommend that the Executive Summary of the QIP be taken to the February Board meeting**

## **5. Progress in areas identified at Self Assessment**

### **SSA 5: Construction**

The Strategy Manager – Quality and Performance, Andrew Robson gave a presentation about SSA 5: Construction on behalf of Tracy Ashcroft, Head of Group, Engineering & the Built Environment. He explained that this area had shown a very poor performance in 2011/2012. There were a substantial number of courses with inadequate outcomes. There were a range of issues underpinning this – effectiveness of course management, insufficient focus on the individual learner, quality assurance of teaching and learning and attendance.

#### **Priorities**

A very detailed action plan had been put into place which targets poor performance but also overarching improvements across the whole area. There was a need to track learner progress. A clear message has been given to staff that the poor performance could not continue and targets have been set across the board.

#### **Provision**

There was a need to look at how provision was organised and run. The amount of part-time provision had been reduced as it was not meeting needs. Some programmes stretched over two years had been reduced to better meet learner needs as there were retention issues.

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### Monitoring

There has been intensive monitoring at course levels and the Curriculum Team have a weekly performance review meeting. There is a focus on individuals and looking to improve ILPs. A new role of a Retention and Achievement Co-ordinator is tracking learners who are 'at risk' of falling behind. 12 Teaching and Learning observations have taken place in the first term with a large proportion of staff covered. These have shown a 50% rate of good or better and underperformance was being targeted in the plan. There was only one inadequate performance as a result of the observations. They were unannounced observations which provided an accurate view and added extra vigour. The new performance management framework supports any teacher who is graded 3 or 4.

A number of priorities have been identified in the plan. In terms of impact, there are positive indications regarding retention particularly in the new courses although there were legacy issues on two and three year programmes – retention suffered through previous management. The figures for retention were as follows:

- 16-18 (LL1) – 91% retention
- 16-18 (LL2) – 96% retention
- 16-18 (LL3) – 79% retention – learners in second year not good
- 19+ (LL2) - 80% retention compared to 64.8% last year

The area was not there yet but it was an improving picture. Bricklaying and plastering had improved but work was needed on attendance. There needs to be improved follow up with learners and the Retention and Achievement Co-ordinator will work with those learners who are not attending. There were signs of positive outcomes with the area moving forward but it will be a long journey.

A governor commented that she had found it a useful summary. She referred to the problems with legacy and asked whether there had been a change of management. AR replied that this had been one of the slowest areas to improve but there was now a different management team to that which started 2011/2012. The governor asked whether any of the two year programmes would not hit their target. AR replied that targets for two year programmes had been revised at the end of the first year for the second year. The governor asked whether attendance had improved and AR replied that it was about 83%. JD advised that every course had a revised target whether it was performing well or poorly. Another governor asked if retention was improving and whether there were 'trigger points' to manage the process. AR indicated that holidays and the February assessments were triggers and it was a key role of the Retention and Achievement Co-ordinator to spot issues and follow up with members of staff. JD advised that the bad weather could also be an issue – but that staff were encouraged to investigate such non-attendance and not allow students to use it as an excuse.

AR advised that assessment review weeks had been designed to take place pre-holiday time. This involved working with learners to see how they are doing on their targets.

The Chair commented on the Learner Voice strategy which had been developed. AR explained that extensive Quality Review work had been undertaken in November and December 2012: focus groups with learners randomly chosen; members of staff talking to learners to get feedback; feedback to Heads of Groups and Curriculum Managers and initial students surveys had taken place in the Autumn asking whether students felt they were learning and asking if they were doing the right course. JD advised that as part of the unannounced Teaching and Learning observations, observers always talk to the students.

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The Chair noted the plan and the succinct update on progress provided which had been very helpful. He indicated that he was happy with what was happening and thanked Andrew Robson for the presentation.

### **RESOLVED to note the plan and the progress provided to the Committee**

#### **SSA 9: Creative Industries**

The Head of Group, Creative Industries, Kevin Smith (KS) gave a presentation on SSA 9: Creative Industries. He advised that there were improved success rates over the past three years but equally some provision was behind the National Rate. A curriculum review had been undertaken in Summer 2012. Lack of understanding of KPI with greater emphasis on peripheral issues. Performance in this area has been inconsistent and some courses are good or better. There are some excellent partnerships which add real strength.

Weakness – LL3 provision continues to be a concern. LL3 programmes perform at an inadequate level 10% - 20% below national benchmarks. Characterised by weaker leadership. Good outcomes are not consistent.

There is poor attendance management with issues about managing progression between Year 1 and Year 2. "At risk" students are not identified or monitored. Self motivated students tended to be successful. The approach was not student centred and tended to be reactive rather than proactive. There has been the introduction of a new Curriculum Management Team with a new Curriculum Leader. They have the knowledge, experience and understanding to improve. There are now very specific individual targets re retention and attendance and identifying "at risk" students. Data is now used as a norm rather than the exception.

In terms of curriculum re-design there is a plan to change awarding body to the University of London (Arts) and offer a more modular curriculum, helping students to identify a path. The department hopes to be awarded the Artsmark Award (a Nationally recognised award).

Progress and impact has so far been good with attendance up from 86% to 89%. The expected success rate is at least a 10% improvement with five courses looking at a 23% improvement.

The Chair thanked KS for a clear and succinct report. The Principal commented that L3 Art and Design which had a predicted success rate for 2011/2012 of 57% was now 93% and asked what had caused the huge increase. JD advised that this was down to retention. The Principal advised that this should be stated otherwise the figure was misleading. He indicated that he was disappointed with the L3 Games, an area which the College had spent considerable money and effort to put in place – 75% success rate. It meant that 25% students failed in this subject and this had been highlighted in the Ofsted inspection. He was concerned that if Ofsted returned they would see no improvement in this area and the College may need to consider reducing the amount of students on this course. He was content with the success rates for Art and Design (93%) and Music Technology (79%). He was concerned at the poor results in Photography (61%) and questioned whether it would lead to a job. There are only 10 people on this course and the results are well below the national average.

KS explained that historically SSA 9: Creative Industries had employed a large number of casual and part-time staff but over the last three months they had moved away from that. The Principal commented that this had been the same across the College with casual/

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part-time roles being converted into permanent posts. A governor enquired whether current staff knew that the previous position had been bad. KS replied that staff were well aware of previous performance. He explained that there was a new awarding body which would provide a change in the curriculum offering. There was a plan to make photography part of a generic offering than a specific programme. If it did not work it would not continue.

The Chair enquired whether retention and attendance needed to be mentioned. The Principal replied that this should be monitored via a traffic light system. There was some discussion about students leaving the department to set up freelance. The Principal said that if they lost students to freelance work and jobs then he would still view the course as a success. However, if they left and go on the dole, then this was not an acceptable situation.

**RESOLVED to note the plan and the progress provided to the Committee**

### **SSA 15: Business, Administration and Law**

The Head of Group, Business & Technology, Kevin Marston (KM) gave a presentation on SSA 15: Business, Administration and Law. He advised that the main area of weakness is around adult long provision in AAT. 16-18 provision showed improvement but was still 3% below the national rate. Poor course level management resulted in poor retention. The priority is to restructure the department and recruit new staff. There had been recruitment of key staff and there was now very strong leadership with the appointment of Claire Bellerby, Curriculum Operations Manager. She has strong individual skills and an accountancy background.

Redesign curriculum offer, review skills base in current staffing offer. Some provisions will be removed or delayed (eg CIM, CIPD). This will have an impact on income but the quality of the provision has to be at the forefront. Income growth will come in the long term. The student intake is down this year by around 60%. The College has considered pulling out of AAT altogether. Four of the previous delivery team have left and been replaced by AAT staff. The curriculum has been redesigned to allow flexibility for the adult professional learner.

Progress so far

All staff measure weekly KPIs which impact on learners. There is already an improvement in attendance and retention. Level 3 AAT has 100% retention.

Adult provision in this area is expected to show an improving picture in forthcoming year.

JD commented that adult attendance appeared to be low although it should be noted that some adults prefer to do their work at home and this does not affect outcomes. 16-18 learners were being encouraged to attend every day so they were 'work ready'. KM indicated that they were trying to provide a more flexible approach to learning. The Principal advised that he did not want the College to become obsessed with AAT. It only accounted for 197 students (70% of adult provision) so it needed to be sorted out or closed. From September 2013 it will cease to be funded and will become full-cost. KM explained CIM/CIPD only had a small cohort of learners.

A governor recognised the significant improvements that had been made and asked when the new staff were appointed. KM advised that in September/October 2012 numbers had dropped for several reasons and staff were recruited at this time. The College has chosen to move AAT Level 4 to a Full Cost provision. The Principal replied that lots of colleges carry AAT Level 4 as a 'loss leader'. JD advised that from a Teaching and Learning point

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of view, flexible contracts were now in place allowing the College to support the learners. This was one of the reasons why an improving picture was being seen in this area. The Chair thanked KM for an encouraging progress report.

### **RESOLVED to note the plan and the progress provided to the Committee**

JD checked that members were happy with the style of the progress reports: a summary, context, priorities and progress and the Committee agreed but commented that they would appreciate something in writing prior to meetings.

## **6. Progress on Ofsted Post Inspection Action Plan**

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality, Judith Doyle (JD) introduced the Post Inspection Action Plan, which was tabled and approved at the Academic Standards Committee on 19 September 2012 and at the Board meeting on 18 October 2012. JD advised that it was a high level action plan which had been created by colleagues and through the Academic Standards Committee in response to the draft Ofsted report and demonstrated how seriously the College took the Ofsted report and had made immediate progress. The document was introduced in late May. JD advised that the QIP is the more detailed document and a lot of the improvements have already been highlighted earlier in the meeting.

The Principal expressed the view that he would like to have the Post Inspection Action Plan and Quality Improvement Plan brought together in one action plan to simplify the process. The Chair replied that this view could be pre-emptive as the Post Inspection Action Plan had been approved by the Board. Another governor suggested that this plan needed to have an additional column to follow on from the 'progress and actions to date' to give a date when established. JD commented that this would reflect the impact of the actions.

The Principal advised that having two plans in operation meant too many processes and being inundated with paperwork. If it required having to take an amalgamated plan back to the Board then he would support doing so. A governor commented that it was really about whole college improvement and therefore there should only be one plan and not both. He agreed that the plans should be amalgamated into one plan and taken to the Board.

The Committee recommended dispensing with the Post Inspection Action Plan and subsuming it into the Quality Improvement Plan. JD explained that when Ofsted came back to inspect the College it would need to have an audit trail on what had been done. It was agreed that recording the decision in the minutes would be sufficient for audit purposes. Every month JD has an Ofsted ready meeting with managers on what they should be doing.

The Chair concluded that the Quality Improvement Plan should be taken to the February Board meeting and that the Committee had considered the overlap between the two plans and recommended that the Post Inspection Action Plan should be subsumed into the Quality Improvement Plan for monitoring purposes.

### **RESOLVED**

- i) to recommend that the Quality Improvement Plan be taken to the February Board meeting**
- ii) to recommend that the Post Inspection Action Plan should be subsumed into the Quality Improvement Plan**

## **7. Higher Education Self Evaluation Report 2012**

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality, Judith Doyle (JD) introduced the Higher Education Self Evaluation document for 2012 which replaced the formal HE Self Assessment Report. She explained that it had been redesigned to align with the requirements of QAAs Review of Colleges Higher Education Provision. The College had undergone major changes since the last review, in terms of procedures and management structures. These changes had enabled the College to address areas for improvement identified at the last review.

The HE Co-ordinator, Tom Cantwell (TE) explained that the document had been written in the new format and the next one would be in this format too. It was a descriptive document about how quality is managed and had been written for the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) with every paragraph being evaluative. The QAA had produced a handbook to inform on how the document should be written. Two governors commented that it was a well-written document but when they got to the end of it they could not tell how the College was doing. The Principal recommended that more detail could be added to the Executive Summary. JD said that she had an HE Strategy document which the governors could see.

Another governor commented that Further Education was frequently presented at the Academic Standards Committee but Higher Education was being noticed by its absence. Course results will be available in June/July and TC agreed to present a report at the September Committee Meeting.

**RESOLVED to approve the contents of the report**

## **8. Identification of areas for progress reports at meeting on 13 February 2013**

Following discussion the Committee agreed that the following progress reports should be presented at the next Committee meeting.

- Work Based Learning
- Teaching and Learning observations
- Attendance/In Year Retention
- A high level progress report on the three courses reported at today's meeting.

Attendance and retention will be presented at every meeting. A report on A and AS level courses will then follow at the April meeting.

## **9. Any Other Business**

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality, Judith Doyle (JD) advised that she wanted to celebrate the achievements of two students who had received unconditional offers for places at Cambridge in English and Medicine. She also highlighted that successful applications through UCAS had increased by 5% on last year which was better than the national average.

## **10. Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 13 February 2013 at 4.00pm.